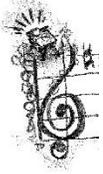


December 3: O Come, O Come Emmanuel



Pray: *Dear Lord. I hate waiting! I want what I want NOW. Yet all time and history are in your control, not mine. Your promises often took multiple generations to fulfill. You're patience is amazing. Were it not, I would not be here today anticipating this precious season of Advent. O Emmanuel, may your Spirit's fruit of patience find its welcome more and more in my heart in this new year. Amen.*

Read: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.” Isaiah 11:1

Now, I was born a “serious Sam” kind of person. I enjoy the minor keys, cloudy days, sad stories, and stormy weather. I wonder what God is up to in my life. I ponder his mysteries and kindnesses to us. I scratch my head over just how he tolerates and loves all us scalawags! OK. If you are not a scalawag, good for you! But I am. And yet he calls me his beloved child. He bids me shed afresh my tears of longings, griefs, and fears this year and sing again: O Come, O Come Emmanuel!

This hymn of longing for Christ is from an ancient song cycle known as the “O Antiphones.” Of the seven O's, our modern hymn version focuses on four of them: O Emmanuel; O Rod of Jesse; O Dayspring; and O Key of David. The other OT phrases not included are: O Wisdom; O God; O King of the Gentiles. John Mason Neale is credited with the most influence over the current English translation of the Latin texts. The main tune is from the Plain Song tradition and filled with somber and plaintive melody. Somewhere along the musical trail the upbeat refrain was added, “Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.”

Where does this longing cry and pleading come from? God's people received vague and mysterious promises of one to come. And these words were spread out over hundreds, thousands of years. Some might have thought: “Will there ever be a promised one who comes? Maybe it's our current prophet or our present King? Maybe it was King David or maybe his son King Solomon!” But the prophets keep pointing forward. They kept promising there is yet one to come who will rescue, save the people.

Now we live on the other long side of Jesus' coming. The word “Christmas” is a conflation of “Christ's mass” and points back to his coming. Christmas services are now more joyful and glad events! But for this Advent season we patiently wait for his next coming and reflect on all the sweet, mysterious clues the Lord's prophets of old gave us. O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

-- Jack Merzig

